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Luther in the Tropics: Karsandas Mulji and the Colonial ‘Reformation’ of Hinduism

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ABSTRACT

One of the standard narratives that scholars tell about the encounter of Asian religions with colonial modernity is the narrative of “Protestantization.” This article rethinks that narrative through close readings of texts written by the two protagonists of one of nineteenth-century India’s most emblematic events: the Maharaj Libel Case (1862). During and after this scandalous trial, reformer and journalist Karsandas Mulji was cast as an “Indian Luther.” His opponent Jadunathji Brizratnji Maharaj, meanwhile, was depicted as an unreformed advocate of priestly tyranny. The article rereads the relationship between Mulji and the Maharaj in order to suggest how Protestantism might be refigured and retheorized from the colonial margin. Arguing that in the nineteenth century “reform” served as a site for the exchange of mobilized ascetic technologies, it tracks how ascetic technologies of self-discipline connected the religious worlds of Protestantism and Hinduism.

Some Indian Luther may be roused to give expression to the sentiments that have long been secretly, though it may be vaguely, indefinitely, waveringly, cherished in the bosoms of thousands. Whole districts may awaken from their slumbers. Whole cities may proclaim their independence. Whole provinces may catch the flame of liberty. All India may be born in a day!

Alexander Duff (1840)

At Madame Tussaud’s Wax Works, while strolling through corridors filled with English monarchs, American presidents, and Indian governors general, Karsandās Mūljī (1832-1871) found himself face to face with three figures eerily reminiscent of his own recent past: the “great reformers” (*sudhārāwālā mahā puruṣ*) John Knox, John Calvin, and Martin Luther. These wax statues, he later wrote, were like actual people “with only their spirits yet to be put in” (*mātra jīvaj mukvānuṃ bākī che*) (Mulji 2001 [1866]: 143). Just one year earlier, back home in Bombay, Mulji himself had been acclaimed as “a Reformer, a Martin Luther of the Banian caste” for the role that he had played in the scandalous Maharaj Libel Case (*Report of the Maharaj Libel Case 1862*: 83; henceforth *MLC*). Now he was further challenging the bounds of caste and community by voyaging over the “black

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waters” to the metropolitan heart of the British empire, surely realizing that when he returned home and refused ritual purification he would be outcasted and ostracized by all but the most radical of his friends and acquaintances. But return was not only inevitable; it came sooner than expected. Ill-health plagued Mulji in cold, wet London, and after refusing a doctor’s advice to eat meat during his stay, he resolved to return to the tropics in September, before winter settled over England (Motiwalla 1935: 42).

Although Mulji does not expand upon his encounter with the wax Luther in his *Inglanḍmām Pravās* (*Travels in England* [1866]), it is a resonant moment— and not just for Mulji, but also for the Hindu reformist milieu of which he was a signal part. Two Luthers faced off that day in 1863, and in their uncanny doubling they offer a window onto how “Luther” as a symbolic property functioned in the colonial nineteenth century. If the wax effigy had inherited the form of Luther, Mulji, it would seem, had inherited the “great reformer’s” missing spirit. The German original, meanwhile, remained conspicuously absent: whatever Martin Luther’s early modern accomplishments, they bear only a tangential relationship to the anglophone nineteenth century. As the scene at Madame Tussaud’s suggests, more important than how either of these latter-day Luthers related to their early modern referent is how each of them related to the other, in a web of signification contemporary to both and specific to their historical moment.

This article attempts to chart some of the interrelations between metropolitan and colonial citations of Luther in the anglophone nineteenth century by analyzing Karsandas Mulji and his relationship to Protestantism. It proposes that we depart from a conventional narrative about the “Protestantization” of Asian religions, even while keeping the “Protestant” in full view as a cultural category in need of theoretical re-elaboration. Arguing that in the nineteenth-century “reform” served as a site for the exchange of mobilized ascetic technologies, it asks how we might reread the relationship between Mulji and his “priestly” nemesis, Jadunāthjī Brizratanjī Mahārāj.

While centered on a particular historical archive (defined by Mulji), the article’s primary aim is theoretical: to think through what a postcolonial approach to Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–5) could look like. Peter van der Veer’s recent work has sought to articulate a “post-Weberian project” that sets aside the search for civilizational essences in favor of analysis of “networks of historical interaction” (Van der Veer 2011: 270–71). As he remarks, Weber’s *Protestant Ethic* is a text that fails to account for Protestantism’s hold on capitalist modernity because, in its rush to Protestant origins (and thus, presumably, the “essence” of Protestantism), it neglects the more recent moorings of its own historical conjuncture in the colonial nineteenth century. To theorize the Protestant ethic, much less to pose a comparative question about it, one first has to parse its relationship to empire (Van der Veer 2001: 11). Drawing a direct genealogical line between Mulji and Weber, this article is meant as a small contribution to that larger effort.

After providing some background information on Mulji, the article reflects on what it means to interpret him as a “Luther” or a person who tried to effect a “Reformation” within Hinduism. It does not make any claims about Martin Luther himself or the global spread of Lutheranism. Rather, my interest is in how Luther was represented in nineteenth-century texts in English and Gujarati, where he was often used as a symbol for the Protestant Reformation more generally. The article as a whole is meant as a “reading,” however circuitous, of the encounter at Madame Tussaud’s, with its specifically English Luther. This scene demonstrates how religious reformism brought “the tropics” to Protestant England, just as surely as it brought Luther to the tropics. It also suggests how de-historicized abstractions like “Protestantism” and “Hinduism” flatten the complexities of cultural forms and the lives that unfold within them. Thus, my purpose in revisiting the “Protestantization” thesis is not to prove it incorrect (whatever that would entail), but simply

to suggest that it is necessarily inadequate. By detaining us for a while at the museum with Mulji, I hope to open up space for other narratives about how the colonial translation of Protestantism structured the field of possibilities available to nineteenth-century Hindu reformers.

Mulji and the Maharaj

The Maharaj Libel Case of 1862 thrilled scandalmongers throughout India with its tales of a Gujarati guru gone bad, earning acclaim by the end of the nineteenth century as the “greatest trial of modern times since the trial of Warren Hastings” (Motiwala 1935: 33). The controversial contest between reform-minded journalist Karsandas Mulji and Jadunathji Brizratani, a leader or “Maharaj” of the Puṣṭimārgi Vaiṣṇavas, had been brewing for years in the Gujarati press. It was not until an especially umbrageous 1860 article spurred Jadunathji to sue Mulji for libel, however, that their row went national with the leap into English. The article in question not only denounced the Pushtimarg as heterodox, a latter-day corruption of the originary Vedic religion; it also specifically accused Jadunathji of foisting himself sexually on his female devotees. Although Jadunathji had hoped that the Bombay Supreme Court would clear his good name, he was sorely mistaken. After a grueling hearing that filled a full twenty-four days in court and stretched out over almost three months (January 24–April 22), the British judges decided that Mulji’s libel was justified. As alleged, the Pushtimarg was held to be a heterodox debasement of authentic Hinduism, and Jadunathji a libidinous sham of a spiritual guide.

Along the way, there had been many titillating revelations. Followers of the Pushtimarg were said to drink water in which the Maharaj had washed his feet, to eat the dust that he walked on, and to chew his pre-masticated *pān* (*MLC* 1862: 173–74). It was further rumored that the Maharaj required his male followers to surrender their body, mind, and property (*tan*, *man*, and *dhan*) to the Maharaj—and that “property” was construed to include wives and daughters (*MLC*, 125). The gossip confessions that poured forth from the witness stand that spring included many lurid tales of sexual surrender (e.g., *MLC* 123); and even more shocking to bourgeois male mores than the heady blend of the devotional and the erotic that these tales implied was the sense, evident in so many of the testimonies, that the women involved might actually have been enjoying themselves. The verdict against the Maharaj was cinched when two different doctors, one of them leading Bombay citizen Bhau Daji, testified to having treated the religious leader for syphilis on multiple occasions via the topical application of liquid mercury FIX (*MLC*, 138–39, 226). Many, it seems, enjoyed these smutty disclosures, snapping up copies of the two Bombay daily papers to follow the scandal. Other onlookers perhaps sided with the *Poona Observer*, which prudishly complained that the trial was “about as disgusting [a one] as can be imagined” (30 January 1862).

And then there were the trial’s two major players. Jadunathji Brizratani, for his part, had been among the more progressive of the Pushtimargi Maharajas, establishing a school for girls and volunteering for public debates with English-educated reformers over topics like widow remarriage. Karsandas Mulji, meanwhile, was firmly of the reform party. During the 1850s and 60s, he worked to extend the criticism of tradition already underway among Marathi-speaking Hindus and Gujarati-speaking Parsis to his city’s Gujarati Hindu population. As a Kaporī Bania, and thus a member of his city’s most elite commercial caste, Mulji was in a good position to advance such a critique. Unlike most other members of his caste group, Mulji had been educated in English at Bombay’s Elphinstone Institution, the preeminent English educational establishment in western India, consolidated in 1840. A classic instance of a “Macaulay man,” Mulji was mocked in his lifetime for “aping” the English by wearing trousers (Motiwala 1935: 55). His fellow Elphinstonians

of the 1840s and 50s included Dadabhai Naoroji, Bhau Daji, K. R. Cama, M. G. Ranade, and Mulji's close friends and associates, the poet Narmadshankar Lalshankar and the educationalist Mahipatram Rupram. As they graduated from Elphinstone and entered public life, such men came to constitute what Christine Dobbin has termed the "Bombay intelligentsia" (Dobbin 1972). Challenging traditional mores as a means of asserting their own class influence, these men quickly found themselves clashing with the established leaders of their castes and communities (the group that Dobbin dubs Bombay's "merchant aristocracy").

For Mulji, the tale of this conflict began in 1853, when he was just twenty-one. In that year, he wrote two essays that would determine the course of his life. One, which advocated foreign travel, was read before the Buddhi Vardhak Hindu Sabha; meeting with great acclaim, it established him as rising star of the reform world. The other, which advocated widow remarriage, was discovered in his desk by a prying servant and handed over to his recently widowed but religiously orthodox aunt, who was horrified by its argument. Mulji was subsequently ejected from his family home, thus beginning his lifelong financial difficulties (Motiwala 1935; Rupram 1877). Mulji wrote for and edited various Gujarati newspapers during the 1850s and early 1860s, including the Parsi-run *Rast Goftar* and the women's journal *Strī Bodh*. In 1855, in collaboration with the *Rast Goftar*, he founded a reformist newspaper for Gujarati Hindus, the *Satya Prakāś* (*Light of Truth*). During his lifetime, Mulji published several collections of his essays and newspaper articles, as well as the anonymous English-language monograph, *The History of the Sect of Mahārājas, or Vallabhacharyas of Western India* (1865), and *Travels in England* (1866). He died young, at the age of thirty-eight, in 1871.

A central figure for Gujarati Bombay, Mulji was also an important node in the larger subcontinental Hindu reform scene, both within and beyond western India. The memory of the Maharaj Libel Case framed the enthusiastic reception of Keshub Chunder Sen in Bombay in 1864, thus providing part of the context for the Bengal-Bombay connection cemented by the creation of the Prārthana Samāj upon Keshub's return three years later (Majumdar 1975: 15). In 1869, meanwhile, Mulji's supporters Dharmasi and Jaikishendas Khimji visited Banaras, where they met with Swami Dayananda Saraswati and invited him to Bombay; they surely, in the process, mentioned the Maharaj Libel Case, apparent allusions to which appear in Dayananda's magnum opus, the *Satyarth Prakash* (1875). When Dayananda finally arrived in Bombay in 1874-75, the late Mulji's compatriots comprised the core of the city's charter branch of the Arya Samaj (Dobbin 1972: 154-55; Jordens 1998). Such lines of influence should not be surprising. Whether in his advocacy of widow remarriage, women's education, and foreign travel, or in his staunch opposition to sacerdotal authority, Mulji was an emblematic vector of mid-nineteenth century Hindu reformism. He was, moreover, understood as such during his lifetime—especially in relation to the Maharaj Libel Case.

Indeed, the ruling against the Maharaj was quickly hailed as an epochal event. Sir Joseph Arnould, one of the trial's two judges, emphasized its significance in his much-reprinted closing opinion. Praising "these men" who had at great risk to themselves "done determined battle against a foul and powerful delusion," he expressed his hope "that the seed they have sown will bear its fruit"—that there will be a "steady increase in the number of those, whom their words and their examples have quickened into thought and animated to resistance, whose homes they have helped to cleanse from loathsome lewdness, and whose souls they have set free from a debasing bondage" (*MLC* 1862: 234). Since Arnould's confident pronouncement, the Maharaj Libel Case has consolidated its place as a canonical event in the annals of Hindu reformism, distilling and dramatizing key religious changes of the colonial period. It testifies to the emergence of an Orientalist legal apparatus that displaced traditional structures of religious authority in the process of asserting its own ability to adjudicate Hindu orthodoxy (Haberman 1993). It highlights the constitutive exclusion of women

from public debates that nonetheless took female sexuality and the regulation of the domestic sphere as a primary locus of religious reform (Lütt 1995; Shodhan 1997; Thakkar 1997). Finally, it exemplifies how an emergent Anglophone bourgeoisie used colonial legal institutions as well as the print public to displace what Amrita Shodhan terms “caste politics,” largely evacuating these traditional institutions of their juridical and political functions, so that caste would retain its salience only as a social marker (Shodhan 2001). The Maharaj Libel Case was certainly not the only trial of the 1860s, whether in Bombay or elsewhere, to flatten the complexities of caste and religion in producing the type of fixed identity that was a central component of colonial law (Mallampalli 2011; Purohit 2012). Nor was it the only trial of the era to fixate on sexual liaisons between priests and housewives (Sarkar 2001). At once specific to Bombay and indicative of larger trends, the Maharaj Libel scandal distills many of the core concerns of colonial Indian historiography.

In amplifying and refining our understanding of the Maharaj Libel Case, the scholarship on the trial has moved beyond Arnould’s archly imperial narrative, which celebrated colonialism for “liberating” the colonized from indigenous religious institutions. But, in focusing on the social and institutional changes prompted by the trial, it has also tended to lose sight of an essential aspect of colonial discourse: its insistence on the reform of subjectivity, which during the period was seen as either a necessary corollary of social reform or a precondition for it. Arnould’s judgement is characteristic. To his mind, the trial centered on the freeing of “souls” from “a debasing bondage,” on the “quickenings” of thought, and the dispelling of “delusion.” The reform of society is the presumed outcome of these shifts in, and reengineering of, Indian souls and inseparable from them. As Alexander Duff memorably put it some twenty odd years earlier, to “regenerate” a people “steeped in the very slough of bondage,” the colonizing power must first act upon the mind (Duff 1840: 61–64). To insist on the centrality of the reform of subjectivity to the Maharaj Libel Case is not to contradict the claims put forward as to the trial’s influence on colonial law and forms of knowledge, or on religious identity and practice. It is, rather, to complement these claims by asking how an earlier set of concerns about religious “liberation” might be reframed in light of this scholarship.

By Joseph Arnould’s account, the Maharaj Libel Case stands as an exemplary instance of what we might, following the lead of philosopher Charles Taylor, call a “subtraction story” of modern subjectivity (Taylor 2007). Mulji heroically liberated the Pushtimargi Vaishnavas from the fetters of their religious bondage so that they could assume political majority as properly autonomous, critical subjects. Subtract the priests, the story goes, and you find modern selfhood just waiting to be free. Taylor, for his part, thinks that such stories are ultimately inadequate because they neglect the social and institutional practices that have gone into making modern “buffered” subjectivity, which he views as a product of the modern social imaginary, rather than something antecedent to it. A fuller narrative of the emergence of modern selfhood would need to give an account of the technologies of subjectivation that produce the modern “individual,” rather than naturalizing the individual as the natural or inevitable outcome of modern history.

During the Maharaj Libel Case, and arguably in colonial India more broadly, the prototypical subtraction story was that of Reformation. Mulji’s biographer B. N. Motiwala, writing in the 1930s, is illustrative. He not only attributes to Mulji the “spirit” of Martin Luther (1935: 53, 63, 65, 99); he identifies this spirit in Mulji’s “magnificent crusade” to “free men and women from ecclesiastical slavery” and “priestly tyranny” (Motiwala 1935: 56–57). As in Alexander Duff’s paean to the “flame of liberty” in the epigraph to this article, Luther was routinely presented as the great liberator. This narrative clearly provides a woefully impoverished account of the Pushtimargi devotees’ relationship to the Maharaj, apprehending it in terms of a stereotyped narrative of “priestcraft” that can see only

self-serving veniality on one side of the religious bond and blind credulity on the other. But it also, I will suggest, provides an inadequate account Mulji and his own effort to disseminate technologies of ascetic self-discipline among his Gujarati readership.

Looking for Luther

One of the standard narratives that scholars tell about the encounter of Asian religions with colonial modernity is the narrative of “Protestantization.” As the story goes, during the nineteenth century from Bengal to Ceylon reformers like Ram Mohan Roy and Anagārika Dharmapāla fitted their traditions to a set of Protestant cultural norms that they had imbibed through English education and through the street-side polemics of the Christian missionaries who peppered the subcontinent after the 1810s (Farquhar 1915; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1990; Jones 1989; Kopf 1979). Reformers promoted ordinary believers’ access to religious texts; railed against those texts’ priestly mediators; instituted once-weekly religious services on the Christian model; denigrated image-worship, seen as embarrassingly “Catholic”; and even replicated peripheral Protestant institutions like the YMCA (as with Ceylon’s Young Men’s Buddhist Association).

British and Indian Anglophone writers, meanwhile, celebrated such efforts, liberally bestowing the moniker “the Luther of India” on sundry religious leaders, both ancient and modern. By the 1880s, the list of Indian Luthers included not only the Buddha and Shankaracharya, but also Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, and Kabir, as well as Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Dayananda Saraswati (Fergusson 1868; Collet 1871; Olcott 1879; Monier-Williams 1883; Hunter 1886). The history of this appellation is a complicated one, with different actors invoking it toward different ends—some of them indirectly anticolonial, as in the twentieth-century Arya Samaji appropriation of the “Indian Luther” idea (e.g. Prasad 1908), others framed within vernacular languages like Marathi, as in protests against caste hierarchy (O’Hanlon 1985: 115-16). In teasing out the complexities of the phrase, one would at minimum want to distinguish between two distinct meanings that seem to have jostled for dominance over the course of the nineteenth century. The first, which implicitly defined an “Indian Luther” as a person who successfully converts Indians to Protestant Christianity, appears to have been more common earlier in the century, when it was applied to East India Company chaplain Claudius Buchanan (1766-1815) (*Christian Observer* 1834). It is this meaning that is invoked by Alexander Duff in the epigraph to this article, where “Luther” carries the missionary hope that someday India might be wholly converted to Christianity.

The second usage diverted Duff’s desires. It implicitly defined an “Indian Luther” as a person who effects a Reformation from within *any* religious tradition, a process exemplified by the distinctly non-Christian Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), whose “Reformation” was understood as having actually protected Hinduism *against* Christianity. I suspect that the emergence of this latter meaning represented a substantial innovation, one that anticipated and created space for the twentieth century academic discourse of “Protestantization,” while also harkening back to the problematic of conversion.

A full analysis of the search for an “Indian Luther” is well beyond the scope of this article. Here, I simply want to note what is perhaps the most obvious function of this discourse: its role in securing the interpretive hegemony of British categories over Indic content (King 1999: 144-45). By looking for Luther in colonial India, nineteenth century thinkers risked flattening the specific textures of Hindu religious reform by fitting it to a preconceived notion of what a “Reformation” should be. This was a procedure, moreover, that had significant stakes within contemporary theories of what we might anachronistically term political “modernity.” James Mill, for example, considered

the Reformation “the great and decisive contest against priestly tyranny for liberty of thought.” By bestowing on the people the power “of judging for themselves,” the Reformation “totally altered the condition of human nature, and exalted man to what may be called a different stage of existence” (Majeed 1992: 179). The implication of Mill’s claim is clear enough: India will lag behind London until it too finds its Luther.

A more recent scholarship on religious dissent in South Asia has tried to sidestep Luther as a paradigm for reform. Some works map the different “traditions of protest” that converged on colonial India (Jones 1989); others identify pre-modern Indian analogues to the tolerant values of secular liberalism (Sen 2006). I worry, however, that in trying to chart a history of religious criticism that bypasses or de-centers the West, such efforts inevitably retain Europe as their “silent referent.” As Dipesh Chakrabarty has it, the experience of European modernity is “both indispensable and inadequate” in theorizing non-Western modernity (Chakrabarty 2000: 16). Surely the same holds for the cultural sign “Luther”; in order to think past it, we first have to think through it. Rather than simply ignoring Luther, and thus rendering his influence invisible, we would do better to generalize and distend the sign “Luther” so that it might be reread from the colonial margin—to, in a word, “tropicalize” this icon of the Reformation.

Which brings us back to Karsandas Mulji, so stricken by the English weather. On the one hand, Mulji—an English-educated journalist with an acute dislike for institutional religious authority and a penchant for reading Christian sermons (more of which below)—would seem an emblematic agent of “Protestantization.” On the other hand, and despite its considerable interpretive power, that term seems inadequate in describing Mulji’s uncanny encounter at Madame Tussaud’s. Surely this scene of confused, doubled, and projected identities is richer and more complicated than the language of “Protestantization” would suggest. For starters, the Protestantization narrative bypasses the wax figure itself. There is surely irony in the fact that Luther, his name a byword for disenchanted, iconoclastic Christianity, should be reinserted into the imagistic culture of what Simon During has dubbed Victorian London’s “magic assemblage” (During 2002). Although it is unlikely that any visitor to Madame Tussaud’s in the 1860s would have mistaken the effigy of Luther for a ghost or some other kind of supernatural being, the ability of such figures to conjure up supernatural experiences even while disavowing them was, as During argues, central to the kind of pleasure that they offered their audiences.

One could also ask, and in a related vein, whether the Reformation was in fact over and done with in the nineteenth century, or whether “Reform” remained, in some sense, unfinished business. Such claims of incompleteness had long been popular among the more ardent type of Puritan (as in John Milton’s complaint that “yet thus is the church, for all this noise of reformation, left still unreformed” [Milton 1835: 431]). But as the virtual byword of nineteenth century Britain, “Reform” moved well beyond narrowly ecclesiastical contexts. At times an empty, or nearly empty, signifier, it took on any number of functions, channeling and containing the destabilizing effects of revolutionary events in France, mobilizing radical impulses in Britain, and cutting across a potpourri of period causes including anti-slavery, temperance, women’s suffrage, Irish nationalism, anti-vivisection, factory reform, and Chartism, to name just a few. Despite their many differences, reform movements demonstrated considerable unity, benefiting from both “horizontal linkages” that connected the “various types of nineteenth century reformer at any one time,” as well as “vertical linkages” that connected reform movements over time (Harrison 1980: 119). Especially important was the transferability of reformist ideas, principles, and practices which “once articulated could readily be applied elsewhere” (ibid: 120). Reformist culture may have shifted substantially in Britain after the passage of the Reform Act of 1832, but “reform” remained a potent cultural sign and one

that continued to animate and interlink disparate social and political projects in both colony and metropole.

Even as the rhetoric of “reform” left Protestantism behind, no longer taking the Church as its paradigmatic object, it continued to invoke the Reformation and associate itself, however nebulously, with the legacy of Luther. Often this was for strategic purposes: invoking the Reformation could win moderates and conservatives over to causes that might otherwise seem dangerously “radical” (Burns and Innes 2003). But at other times, and especially with respect to “moral” causes, the convergence of religion and reform appears more fundamental. This is particularly true with regard to India. Starting in the 1790s, British Evangelicals pleaded for the East India Company to permit Christian missionaries to enter India, so that by spreading the gospel they might improve the moral condition of Britain’s “Asiatic subjects,” as well as of the imperial enterprise itself—morally suspect since the Warren Hastings debacle (Grant 1813; Dirks 2008). Although other more “secular” currents of British reform culture (e.g. Utilitarianism) also exerted considerable influence in India, the rhetorical prominence of Christianity ensured that religion would mediate India’s relationship to the broader Anglophone reformist world (Stokes 1959).

I think that situating Mulji within the raucous scene of nineteenth century reformism suggests a substantially different approach to his life and work than does the narrative of Protestantization. The Protestantization narrative assumes its aura of inevitability by reifying the Reformation, presenting it as a readily replicable process and a discrete “stage” of modernity already neatly completed by the Protestant West. By framing Protestantization as a unified process, it necessarily downplays conflicts among different Protestant groups. Thus, in colonial India, “Luther” tended to represent Reformation writ large, standing in for and eliding differences among various early modern reformers (Knox, Calvin, etc.). More fundamentally, the narrative can obscure the extent to which “reform” in the nineteenth century confused the line between the religious and the secular in its mobile challenge to status quo. The “Protestant” could not be neatly abstracted from its broader cultural, social, and political frameworks—frequent slippages among the Protestant, secular, and liberal strands of modernity being a hallmark of the period. Clearly not all scholars who have made use of the Protestantization narrative mean it in exactly this way. Nonetheless, particularly if we bear in mind the continuities between nineteenth and twentieth century discourses, it seems clear that “Protestantization” constrains how we conceptualize “reform.” By implicitly yoking the colonial translation of Protestantism to a predetermined outcome, it forecloses some of the most interested questions raised by this translation.

In Mulji’s time, “reform” remained a cultural symbol open to reinterpretation, reclamation, and experimentation. Thus, instead of understanding Mulji as Protestantizing Hinduism, or effecting a simple one-way transfer of cultural goods, it makes more sense to situate him within a network of reformist exchanges, installing yet another set of “horizontal linkages” within the period’s reform assemblage. No longer relegated to a prior stage of religious development, he emerges as fully coeval with his fellow reformists in Britain and beyond.

Set in this frame, the scene at Madame Tussaud’s starts to look much messier. Multiple vectors with divergent directionalities converge on it: not just “Luther,” but also the conflicting legacies of Calvin and Knox; the educational apparatus of a museum that just barely rationalizes the magical spectacle of its *Wunderkammer* forbearers; the ambivalences of colonial English education; and, indeed, the shadow of the guillotine (looming over so much British talk of “reform”) that opens the legend of Madame Tussaud herself. This changed scene cues an altered question. Instead of asking how Mulji Protestantized Hinduism, it becomes more interesting to ask what kinds of exchanges were enabled by his entry into an unstable Anglophone reform assemblage that included, but was

not totally overdetermined by, the sign of “Luther.”

I would reiterate that my purpose here is not to suggest that the Protestantization model has no interpretative value. On the contrary, I think that it remains an essential analytic tool for the study of colonial religion, with the ability to provide compelling readings of many texts and figures—including, I am aware, Karsandas Mulji. My aim, rather, is to explore other possible readings of the colonial translation of Protestantism that might be foreclosed by the Protestantization narrative. My particular interest is in how Max Weber’s account of the “Protestant ethic” might be reread in order to open up new questions in the study of colonial Hinduism. The discussion of Weber here is somewhat oblique, with my interpretation of his thought unfolding more from within the archive of texts produced by Mulji than through a close reading of *The Protestant Ethic* itself. I take this method to be in the general spirit of Weber and other thinkers interested in how ideas inhabit cultural forms and for whom “theory” is something that happens in a manner immanent to “history.”

As suggested at the beginning of this article, I understand Mulji as having established connections among different types of ascetic technologies of the self, or at least gesturing to a series of possible connections among ascetic practices. Mulji began translating English sermons and conduct manuals into Gujarati in the late 1850s—thereby also bringing a distinctively Protestant ethic into Gujarati’s cultural world. These translations provide essential context for Mulji’s depiction of the Pushtimargi Maharajas as popishly Catholic (Mulji 1870: 152-156). As I will argue, instead of a contest between “Protestant” self-rule and “Catholic” submission to priestly authority, we should understand Mulji and the Maharaj as each plying a different kind of ascetic self-discipline geared toward the transformation or reformation of human subjectivity. Despite the dramatic conflict between the two men, the colonial conjuncture that brought them together allows us to see their two reform programs as, in an important sense, analogous. It also allows us to understand Mulji as a horizontal linkage connecting the Maharaj to a larger reform assemblage.

Translated Virtue: Karsandas Mulji’s *Moral Training*

In order to understand that Mulji’s reform agenda was not simply about liberating liberal subjects but rather about producing them, his critique of the Maharaj needs to be situated within the larger body of work that he produced during the late 1850s. Because these writings do not directly bear on the problems addressed by the Maharaj Libel Case, they have not generally been read in relation to the trial. Nonetheless, Mulji’s earlier essays on conduct can, in fact, help us to rethink what the trial was about. These essays detail a mode of work upon the self that signals a convergence of Protestant self-discipline, social reform, and the gendered affective economy of the home. Interesting in their own right, they also help reframe Mulji’s interest in the Maharaj, and specifically in his failure to do what Mulji indicates is the proper work of priests—to guide and manage their flocks.

Taking a holistic view of Mulji’s writings during this period (1855-1860) suggests continuities among bodies of work generally held to be distinct: his ethical writings, his women’s writings, and his criticisms of priestly religion. These bodies of work correlate roughly to three books: *Nīti-Vacan (Moral Training)* (1859); *Saṃsār Sukh (Domestic Happiness)* (1860); and the *Nibandhamālā (Garland of Essays)* (1870), which collects newspapers articles first published in the late 1850s.¹ Here, I will focus on Mulji’s first book, *Moral Training (Nīti-Vacan)*, which provides the template for the genre of didactic moral writing that preoccupied Mulji throughout his career. *Moral Training* plies a decidedly Protestant ethic, and this is no coincidence. As its preface explains, more than half of its sixty-five essays are translated from English texts like those of “Bler” and “Gregari”—

presumably the Scottish Presbyterian minister and rhetorical theorist Hugh Blair (1718-1800) and Irish Anglican minister and writer George Gregory (1754-1808). Mulji's original essays emulate their English models in tone, style, and topic. So, for example, where a translated essay on "The Uses of Time" informs its reader that time "is considered the most invaluable of all things," Mulji's own essays pick up on this theme by embedding it in moral tales about bourgeois men who repent the time they have wasted in frivolous leisure pursuits and vow to dedicate their futures to social uplift (Mulji 1923 [1859]: 139).

In addition to translations from these unnamed collections of sermons, Mulji's *Moral Training* also includes extracts from one text that he mentions by title: Robert Dodsley's *The Oeconomy of Human Life* (1750-51). Reckoned the most widely reprinted book of the eighteenth century, Dodsley's *Oeconomy* was by any measure an extraordinarily popular volume. By 1800, it had gone into two hundred editions, with translations into at least nine different languages and a global fan club that included Thomas Jefferson (Eddy 1988; Solomon 1996; Bray 2009).² Given its global circulation, it is not surprising that at least one copy of the book made it to Bombay by the 1850s, nor is it particularly remarkable the Elphinstone-educated Mulji, steeped in English, would have gotten his hands on it.³

Much more interesting, I think, is how Dodsley's *Oeconomy* situates itself—and therefore Mulji—in relation to the behavioral regulations of Protestantism. In form and content, the *Oeconomy* is a work of "didactic morality" composed in a quasi-biblical style so ponderously inflated that Dodsley himself felt the need to apologize for it (Eddy 1988: 460). It brims over with moral maxims like following: "The thoughtless man brideleth not his tongue; he speaketh at random and is entangled in the foolishness of his own words" (Dodsley 1785: 29). Although not a "Protestant" text in the strict sense of the word (Dodsley, who was Voltaire's English publisher, seems to have been a Deist), it clearly falls well within the domain of the diffusely ascetic culture that Max Weber associated with the Protestant ethic. Consider, for example, this chestnut: "Idleness is the parent of want and of pain; but the labor of virtue bringeth forth pleasure... The slothful man is a burden to himself; his hours hang heavy on his head" (Dodsley 1785: 32-33). This is surely

1 The translation of the titles requires some explaining. Although *Samsār Sukh* is written entirely in Gujarati, the cover page includes an English translation of its title (a fairly common practice at the time). This English title (*Domestic Happiness*) differs substantially from the Gujarati (*World Happiness*), but in a manner that reveals something about the implicit argument of the book: the affective management of the home is the key to global happiness. *Nīti-vacan* is only titled in Gujarati and, although that title might be most literally translated as something like "Discourses on Ethics," I have deferred to Mulji's translation of the phrase in his own Gujarati-English dictionary as "moral training." The phrase does not appear in the first (1862) edition of the dictionary; that Mulji decided to add it to the second (1868) edition would seem to indicate that he had given the matter considered thought (Mulji 1868).

2 Because Dodsley published his book anonymously, there was much controversy over its authorship, and other writers sought to capitalize on its popularity by publishing under the same title. In 1751, *Oeconomy of Human Life, Part the Second* was published (Eddy tentatively attributes it to a Dr. John Hill) and this was subsequently appended to most later editions of Dodsley's work. Mulji's copy clearly included both parts, as the *Nīti-vacan* includes translations of essays from *Part the Second* (e.g. "Revenge").

3 Mulji was probably the first writer to translate Dodsley into a South Asian language, but he was not to be the last. In addition to English-language reprints of Dodsley in Calcutta (1877), Bombay (1889), and Banaras (1922), there have also been twentieth-century translations into both Panjabi and Telugu (Dodsley 1877; Bray 2009)

as abstemiously self-denying a piece of advice as anything to be met with in Weber's own Deist paragon of Protestant virtue, Benjamin Franklin (Weber 2001: 14-20). Even though Dodsley recommends that his reader "lyeth down late" after rising early (so as to maximize industriousness), he and early-to-bed Franklin both devise their regimens so as to "preserveth the health" and facilitate the acquisition of wealth (1785: 33).

Weber famously diagnosed Protestants' neurotic compunction about regulating behavior as a form of "worldly asceticism" (*innerweltliche Askese*). Protestantism, in the Weberian narrative, generalized otherworldly monastic discipline to the lay population. It did this in part via the Lutheran notion of "the calling" (*Beruf*), which celebrated "the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume" (Weber 2001: 40). In the world but not of it, Weber's Protestant ascetics work hard, not because it brings them pleasure, but because it is their divinely ordained duty. Deferring the fruits of their labor, these ascetics amass capital, and thus give rise to the modern world order, "iron cage" and all.⁴

We see this set of concerns reflected in Mulji's *Moral Training*— most interestingly in his own original compositions. "Human Pride" (*māṇasnum abhimān*), for example, describes a rich man who gazes admiringly at himself in the mirror up to fifteen times per day. While in his fancy carriage, he whips his horse with great pomp and circumstance; while seated in his beautiful garden, he relishes the company of his sycophantic friends (*hājīyāo*). Having portrayed this character, the essay presents its reader with "a terrifying and sorrowful thought": as soon as the breath leaves the body the corpse begins to stink and, devoured by worms, dwindles to a skeleton. Mulji instructs his (presumptively male) reader to meditate on this truth by standing in front of a mirror, examining every part of his body, and asking what will become of it. Lest there be confusion, Mulji answers the question: "it becomes dust." Regular performance of this mirror practice is recommended as a cure for vanity. The resultant ascetic subject will forego worldly pleasures and work harder for the benefit of others (his brothers, neighbors, fellow countrymen, and all humanity), if only to secure his good name, the only part of us that survives our death. The essay concludes by enjoining vigilant awareness of the traps of this world: "You should always remain aware (*cetto*)" (Mulji 1923 [1859]: 60-63). Where "Human Pride" promotes ascetic denial of worldly pleasure in the name of good reputation, "Now I Realize Everything" (*have badhum sujhe che*) does so in the name of God (Mulji 1923 [1859]: 87-90). In the essay, a man awakens in the middle of the night and realizes that he has misspent his fifty-one years in laziness, fraud, and treachery. Written primarily as a long first-person lament in which the narrator begs God (*īśvar*) to give him his youth back, the essay concludes with the man vowing to spend his remaining time praising God and working for the benefit of others.

These essays, and others like them, share two characteristics important for understanding how Mulji translates "Protestant" norms of selfhood. First, they recommend a worldly asceticism to a bourgeois male readership asked to replace its sensual pleasures with arduous work for social uplift, deferring present gratification for a future gain that is figured as either posthumous reputation or

4 I understand that many serious objections have been raised against Weber's now canonical account of Protestantism. Many of these objections are empirical in nature, questioning whether Weber actually understood Luther (or Calvinism, or Catholicism, or Franklin etc.) in precise enough historical detail to assess his "spirit." It is not my intention here to defend Weber against these challenges. Rather, I am interested in Weber insofar as he, working at the turn of the twentieth century, is trying to make sense of Protestantism as a cultural force within his own world, not Luther's. Weber's *Protestant Ethic* is not a history book. It is rather, as Foucault once put the matter, "a critical thought which takes the form of an ontology of ourselves, of our present reality" (Foucault 2010: 21). Weber's present is not our present, but it is not so very far removed from Mulji's.

divine reward. Second, they model the cultivation of interiority via agonized solitude. One man is forced to offer an account of himself and his time to God during lonely insomniac hours. Another gazes at his image in the mirror to contemplate his physical impermanence. In both cases, the awareness of death serves as a means of *individuation*, or what Taylor would call “buffer”: although both individuals are ultimately counseled to go forth and help others, the foundational moment for these ascetic subjects remains the moment of introspective crisis (with the mirror scene, I think, serving as the most emblematic illustration of how that moment centers on the subject’s awareness of himself as a discrete, and therefore precarious, individual). Not insignificantly, the act of reading sets the stage for this introspection, even while inscribing readerly interiority within the social field constituted by print culture.

Mulji wrote the newspaper articles that culminated in his 1860 libel concurrently with the essays later collected in *Moral Training*. In order to understand what was at stake in the Maharaj Libel Case, we need to appreciate the program implicit in this largely neglected body of writing. Simply “liberating” the Pushtimargi Vaishnavas from the “tyrannical” influence of their “priests” was not, it would seem, all that was at stake here. Rather, the criticism of priestly religion goes hand in hand with a project of moral reform; freedom from the priest is achieved not by simple subtraction but instead through the institution of a new regime of instruction or discipline. In place of the Maharaj and his followers, we have Mulji and his readers. If the latter are ascetic, or self-disciplining subjects, their interior life is thoroughly mediated by the print object itself, and thus enmeshed in a network of disciplinary or ascetic practices. Between the man and his mirror stands Mulji.

The question remains as to whether these practices are specifically Protestant. In the preface to the second edition of *Moral Training*, Mulji explains that in translating English texts he did his best to eliminate any specifically Christian content so that “all people of different religions (*dharm*) and different castes (*jāt*) can use this small book in like manner” (Mulji 1923: 4). His hope, he writes, is that the book will be useful to young men and women in every Gujarati family (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, and despite the occasional *Rāmāyaṇ* reference, Mulji seems to have emulated Dodsley all too well: *Moral Training* is a text with a dreadfully Protestant ethos. In resisting the Protestantization narrative, I do not mean to deny that Protestant cultural forms found new life in South Asia during the nineteenth century. I simply mean to question the narrative’s implied teleology, asking whether the mobility of Protestant discourses and practices at this time might not lead in unexpected directions, seemingly foreclosed by the mechanical language of “Protestantization.”

Mulji’s translations are a case in point. First, there is the inevitable matter of mimicry: the very iterability of the “Protestant” ensured that each citation of the original would diverge from it, thereby calling the unity of that original into question (Bhabha 2004). Does Mulji count as a Protestant in the same way as Dodsley or Franklin, and if all three of these men (Deists and Hindus that they are) qualify as “Protestant,” what could that term possibly mean? My use here follows from my reading of Weber. When Weber attributes a Protestant ethic to Benjamin Franklin, he is obviously not speaking to the latter’s theological views, which are largely irrelevant to the genealogical arc that connects Protestant self-discipline and the “spirit of capitalism”; this is an argument about practice or habitus, rather than doctrine or belief. Franklin is a secularized Protestant insofar as he transfers a Protestant technology of the self into the secular realm of economic affairs, participating in the larger process whereby “asceticism was carried out of monastic cells and into everyday life.” Weber is coldly deterministic when parsing the relationship between the monastic and the everyday: Puritan discipline ossifies into an “iron cage” that sustains the capitalist order and constrains the humanity of its prisoners (Weber 2001: 123-5). But is this determinism warranted? Or might

there be other ways of reading the Protestant “signature” on modernity (Agamben 2011: 4)? That is, does Protestantism’s citational hold upon the secular operate more in the mode of determinism or (with a nod to Bhabha) of dissemination?

In order to loosen Calvin’s grip, we need only look a little closer at the conceptual move that grounds *The Protestant Ethic*. It is only when the Protestant ethic ceases to be specifically Protestant, Weber suggests, that it assumes its characteristic or ideal form. It is an ethic that emerges fully only once it has detached from its point of origin, putting the “Protestant” under erasure, and dispersing beyond it. Weber charts one route taken by this mobilized set of ascetic technologies, but there is no reason to think this was its sole itinerary. If modernity emerged when, in Weber’s phrase (or at least Talcott Parsons’), religious asceticism “escaped from the cage” of Christian theology, then it behooves us to ask where that asceticism went—not just retracing the line linking Calvin to Franklin, but also looking for other, more unexpected ascetic crossings. To put the point slightly differently, it seems worth asking whether a third movement should be appended to the classic Weberian narrative. If (1) the Reformation generalized monastic asceticism to lay Christians, and then (2) capitalism secularized the resultant form of Protestant asceticism, thus generalizing it beyond Protestantism, what happens when (3) this secularized Protestant asceticism (which both is and is not Protestant) is taken to the colony and generalized yet again via its crossings with other ascetic traditions?

This is the context in which I would situate Mulji. He repurposes the Protestant yet again by pushing it onto novel linguistic, cultural, and religious terrain. Where Weber asked how the Protestant traversed the line between the religious and the secular, Mulji indicates how it traversed the line between the Christian and the Hindu. This is not to say that it made the Hindu Christian, or vice versa. It is simply to suggest that, as an eminently mobile ascetic technology, the “Protestant” entered into assemblage with other forms of asceticism, perhaps remobilizing them in the process.

Or at least Mulji raises the question of how it *might* have done so. *Moral Training* promotes ascetic self-regulation (enjoining its readers to relinquish worldly pleasures), but it does not explicitly engage with Hindu materials, and so any claim to its having established cross-ascetic connections is highly speculative—caught up with fraught questions of reader reception that are foregrounded by the essays themselves, which stipulate how their readers should incorporate their recommendations into daily life. Although we cannot know who was reading *Moral Training*, and even less what they were thinking about when they read it, it seems likely that Mulji’s readers would have interpreted his emphasis on the impermanence of the flesh via a set of religious references internal to Hindu tradition, and perhaps specifically the Pushtimarg.

It is, in any case, clear that Mulji had such questions in mind. His preface commends the essays to all Gujarati readers regardless of their religion (*dharm*) or caste (*jāt*), insisting that everyone can “use this small book in like manner.” With this move, Mulji hails a reading public that subsumes Bombay’s many discrete caste polities. He also analytically separates religious belief from religious practice. Mulji scrubs his essays of theological particulars, not to assert the equivalence of all religions, but to argue for the distinction between “ethics” (*nīti*) and “religion” (*dharm*) proper.⁵ Techniques for self-discipline, he implies, circulate better if detached

5 Mulji’s use of the word “*dharm*” seems to suggest the influence of the English word “religion” (cf. Adcock 2010). For an example of his effort to delimit the semantic range of both “*dharm*” and “*nīti*” (ethics) so as to exclude subjects such as science (*vidyā*), history, and “worldly matters,” which other Gujarati speakers of the time apparently felt comfortable including within the domain of the dharmic, see his criticism of the newly founded Ahmedabad newspaper, the *Dharm Prakāś* in the essay “The Dharma Prakash or Light of Religion” (Mulji 1870: 220–223).

from community, identity, and belief. Mulji's move here seems to parallel Weber's: an "ethic" emerges as such once it is disencumbered of its theological and communitarian trappings.

To compare Weber to Mulji is to return the German comparativist to the colonial milieu that allowed his sociology of religion to emerge in the first place. The contest between Mulji and the Maharaj is more than incidental in this regard: the Maharaj Libel Case directly shaped Weber's research on Hindu asceticism. Weber's *The Religion of India* (1916) explicitly mentions the 1862 trial in its discussion of the Pushtimarg and quotes the trial transcript via a later text (Bhattacharya 1896: 497). It also draws on H. H. Wilson's influential formulation, read aloud during the trial proceedings: "Vallabhāchārya taught that privation formed no part of sanctity, and that it was the duty of the teacher and his disciples to worship their deity not in nudity and hunger, but in costly apparel and choice food; not in solitude and mortification, but in the pleasures of society and the enjoyment of the world" (Wilson 1846: 77; *MLC* 1862: 125). Versions of this claim dominated accounts of the Pushtimarg for the rest of the century, as when Bartle Frere dubbed it a "Sect of Hindu Epicureans" (Frere 1875: 552). Weber concurs with this narrative. He argues that the Pushtimarg negated ascetic otherworldliness through simple inversion, rejecting Hindu "contemplative" culture, but without the creative synthesis of the "Puritan model," with its "this-worldly asceticism." Instead, it produced an "orgiastic" form of religion that embraced the world in all its sensuality (Weber 1958: 314-15; Lütt 1987).

Throughout this period, from Wilson to Weber, the focus was on the early modern writings of the Pushtimarg's founders. In revisiting the question of the Pushtimarg's relationship to Protestantism, my approach here will be different—asking instead how asceticism was configured from within the 1860-1862 controversy itself. Rather than comparing "Protestantism" and "Hinduism" in the abstract, we should look for points of possible connection between these cultural fields, as suggested by specific colonial texts.

Reading the Maharaj: Bhakti as Asceticism

In 1860, to respond to Mulji's attacks on the Pushtimarg, Jadunathji Brizratanji founded his own magazine, the *Svadharm Vardhak ane Samśay Chedak* (*Propagator of Our Own Religion and Destroyer of Doubt*; henceforth referred to as "the *Propagator*"). Most of the *Propagator's* run post-dates the Maharaj Libel Case; here I am only focused on the earliest issues. Amid polemical swipes at its reformist opponents (and especially the "fool" who edits the *Satya Prakāś*), the journal offers a fairly complete course in bhakti devotionism, designed to educate the Maharaj's erring followers in the ways of their sect. Although I will be able to provide only the most cursory account of the journal, I want to argue that what we find in its pages suggests a way of analyzing the relationship between Mulji and the Maharaj that helps refigure the question of Protestantization. The *Propagator* presents bhakti as a mode of worldly asceticism that, although unquestionably different from the asceticism outlined in Mulji's *Moral Training*, appears analogous to it. Instead of fully opposed religious worlds, we find two print-mediated technologies of the self that draw on different religious traditions but remain functionally parallel.

Bhakti, according to Jadunathji, is one of several disciplinary practices (*sādhana*s) enumerated by Hindu tradition. These include renunciation (*tyāg*), yoga (*yog*), fleshly mortification (*tap*), divine insight (*brahmgyān*), and the performance of ritual duty (*karmkāṇḍ*). All of these other disciplines, however, are *saguṇa* (literally, "with qualities"): they remain enmeshed in the material substrate of the cosmos, and so while they can secure a happy rebirth (in a heaven, say), they cannot deliver the soul to the abode of God himself. Only bhakti, as the lone *nirguṇa* ("without qualities")

discipline, can free the soul entirely from worldly things. It is therefore the best of disciplines. Its governing ideal, much discussed during the Maharaj Libel Case, is “self-surrender” (*ātmanivedan*). The devotee is to achieve this ideal by practicing the *navadhā bhakti*, or nine types of devotion. The list, as described in the *Propagator*, suggests a progressive work upon the self. Devotion begins by establishing habitual practices (hearing, singing, remembering the deity at all times); proceeds by extending these practices into pervasive attitudes (servility, friendliness); and culminates in the complete loss or surrender of the self to God (Yadunāth 1911: 9-20). As Richard Barz explains, Śrī Vallabhacarya (founder of the Pushtimarg) inverted the conventional order of the nine bhaktis by placing self-surrender first. What had been the ecstatic end-point of devotional practice was refigured as its prerequisite, minimizing the agency of the devotee by emphasizing the grace (*anugraha*) of the divine (Barz 1976: 81-85).

To the Bombay Supreme Court, this spelled trouble: such doctrines were presented as undermining the autonomy of the liberal subject and thus facilitating the despotic rule of the Maharajas over their servile devotees. By extension, they were also held responsible for the scenes of ritual abasement that so enthralled the Bombay public. John Wilson’s English rendering of a pertinent Sanskrit verse gives a good sense of how the ideal of self-surrender played in translation: “I consecrate to thee my life, my soul, my organs, my property, myself, &c. I am thy slave, oh Krishna” (*MLC*, 1862: 126). Mr. Anstey, the defense attorney, was more direct, alleging that the Pushtimarg’s “doctrines” about “the deliverance of the soul and its re-absorption into the Divine essence” help “enforce the culture of adulterine love and sensual lust towards” the Maharaj and thus facilitate his “engaging in hot love with his devotees!” (*MLC*, 92).

Without denying that such scenes were one outcome of the doctrine of self-surrender, I want to suggest that there are other possibilities (and indeed actualities) implicit here. Some pertain to the ethics of relationality that Jadunathji’s bhakti seems to imply (cf. Gandhi 2006: 115-141). Others derive from the apparent lack of fit between bhakti as a mode of self-discipline and Arnould’s narrative of “spiritual bondage.” It is the latter that will concern me here. After defining “*ātmanivedan bhakti*” (“to entrust the body and soul to the Lord”), Jadunathji relates it to the notion of *karmayoga* outlined in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Just as Arjuna is counseled to relinquish the fruits of his actions and surrender them to God, thereby disencumbering himself of those actions’ karmic consequences, so is the *bhakta* counseled to entrust himself to Krishna (Yadunāth 1911: 18-19). Only the devotee who practices self-surrender has no “desire for the fruit of his discipline” (*sādhannā falnī icchā*), and so only he avoids rebirth (50). In the *Gītā*, the notion of *karmayoga* reconciles the competing imperatives of *dharma* (worldly duty) and *mokṣa* (release from the world) by infusing worldly action with a renunciant spirit. In the world but not of it, the *karmayogi* does his socially ascribed duty as a means of service to God, always standing aloof from a field of action mediated and conditioned by awareness of the transcendent.

This worldly asceticism is especially well suited, as Jadunathji repeatedly affirms, to Hindu householders. Renunciant yogis may have unlimited time to ponder divinity in all its otherworldly abstraction, but householders require shortcuts. Krishna provided images of himself so that ordinary people can more easily keep him in mind during daily affairs. When going to the market to buy vegetables, the devotee should reflect that each item is worthy of being offered to the highest god. When going to do business, he should remember that now is his time to do service. Devotees are to remember God constantly in this way (Yadunāth 1911: 13-14). Pushtimargi practice is meant to supplant the “worldly” (*laukika*) with the “otherworldly” (*alaukika*); but the sect departs dramatically from other Indian religious traditions by discouraging full renunciation as the means of pursuing this otherworldliness (Barz 1972: 9-15, 31-33). As Jadunathji reminds his reader, it is

in order to demonstrate that the bhaktimarg was made especially for householders that the sect's guru is also a householder (*e mārgnā gurū grhasthāśramī che*) (1911: 53). The sect is thus “ascetic,” not in the sense that it refuses the duties or pleasures of worldly life, but rather in its reorienting those pleasures and duties toward the divine.

Since the founding of the Pushtimarg at the turn of the sixteenth century, loving worship of Krishna icons (especially in the form of Śrīnāthjī) had been the primary technique for orienting daily life toward God. By 1860, however, the rising popularity of print media had suggested another means of devotional self-discipline. Jadunathi explains that he founded the *Propagator* in order to educate his followers: because they are ignorant of the scriptures, they have fallen into superstition (*vehem*) (1911: 62). But the Maharaj's readers are unruly. Not everyone in the community, he complains, is taking the journal; and even among those who are, many are reading it like they would read a newspaper, pushing through it quickly without full understanding and without learning to keep it in their hearts (*ibid.*). People are too infatuated with business to take time to read their sect's scriptures; Jadunathji directs them to set aside two hours every evening to do so, as a supplement their pre-existing regimen of image-based worship (45). Rather than a “Protestant” refusal of visual or material religion, here we see print and image snugly aligned as complementary ascetic practices joined in opposition to the mundane pressures of daily life.

Jadunathji's anxiety about his recalcitrant readership is, I would argue, of crucial importance for understanding the kind of power he wielded over his followers. The disciplinary technologies detailed in the *Propagator* are procedures of *self*-discipline. They exert their influence not by subordinating a duped mass to a priestly despot, but rather through a process of ascetic dissemination. The Maharaj may control his flock in part; but, as with his distracted readers, he can never control them in full. This is due in part to the vagaries of media reception. But it also, I think, owes something to the ascetic logic of the Maharaj's bhakti. Because the ideal of “self-surrender” implies a work upon the self as much as it does a relationship with a human other (i.e. the Maharaj), the submission it demands of devotees is more than simple “spiritual bondage.” If we take the Pushtimarg as staging scenes of self-discipline, the Maharaj should be understood as a tool used by the follower for her own spiritual ends, rather than the follower appearing as the simple instrument of her guru's pleasure. Or, more plausibly, we might say that within the Pushtimarg, self-control and priestly control (or autonomy and heteronomy) were irreducibly intertwined. This substantially alters how we conceive of the conflict between the Maharaj and Mulji. The question is thus not one of how “freedom” replaced “control,” nor even one of how one system of control replaced another. Rather, we should ask how these two mobilized ascetic technologies intersected and overlapped, and how both entered into networks of horizontal exchange in colonial Bombay, and well beyond it.

Conclusion

By arguing that “Protestant” remained a mobile and contested term in the nineteenth century, and one linked to ascetic projects of self-making, I hope to have suggested that Protestant cultural forms often dovetailed in surprising ways with Hindu cultural forms. In the book-length project of which this article is a part, I do more to consider how cases like this one might be used to reframe questions of “comparative” religion around colonial contact zones. For now, suffice it to say that if we understand modernity as centering not on the liberation of human subjects from oppressive external powers like priests and gurus, but rather on an intensified interest in “asceticism” as a regulatory technology of the self, this opens up a set of questions about how different asceticisms collide and overlap during the modern period. As we see here, even bhakti can be read as a mode of ascetic

self-regulation that enters into productive assemblage with modern governmentality precisely as a technology for the management of the conduct of self and others.

Instead of acquiescing to the prescriptive plotline of Judge Arnould's subtraction story, we would thus do better to catalogue the multiple technologies of self-regulation that intersected during the Maharaj Libel Case. This was a moment when religious technologies of the self seemed open to new uses and seemed to gesture toward new potentials in human persons and collectivities. Arnould's narrative, I suggest, foreclosed some of these potentialities by delimiting the field of possible technologies of the self and reducing the kinds of available selfhood to the easily plotted duo, "slave" and "free." Now seems an opportune time to bring some of these possibilities back into view in the name of a post-secular politics once again interested in the critical potentialities of religion.

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